

Mathematical Signs: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents

This step-by-step explanation to mathematical signs can help you support your child's learning at home. The subject is broken down into manageable chunks, providing you with a simple guide to follow when exploring different mathematical signs together, either as part of homework or if you decide to give your child some extra support. Whether your child is only just beginning to learn about mathematical signs or they are gaining confidence and want further practice, you will find a step that matches where your child is at as well as some ideas for where to go next.

Within [this area of the website](#), you'll find a selection of resources intended to help your child learn about each step of this guide. Each step also contains a keyword or phrase that you can use to search the Twinkl site for more resources and activities designed to support your child in achieving that stage. Simply type the keyword or phrase into the search bar and press enter to explore together.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. The contents of this resource are for general, informational purposes only. This guide is intended to offer parents general guidance on what subject areas tend to be covered in their child's year group and where they could support their children at home. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. There are some subject areas that we have intentionally not covered due to the nature of how they are taught or because a trained professional needs to teach these areas. We try to ensure that the information in our resources is correct but every school teaches the national curriculum in its own way. If you would like further guidance or are unsure in any way, we recommend that you speak to your child's teacher or another suitably qualified professional.

Mathematical Signs

What Are Mathematical Signs?

Mathematical signs are symbols that are used instead of words and phrases to save time when writing out number sentences and equations. The most common mathematical signs include:

= (equals)

+ (add)

- (subtract)

× (multiply)

÷ (divide)

In year 1, your child will learn how to read, write and interpret mathematical statements involving addition (+), subtraction (-) and equals (=). During year 2, children will also be introduced to the greater than (>) and less than (<) signs as a way of comparing and ordering numbers.

From year 3, your child may be introduced to the 'approximately equal to' sign (\approx) when estimating calculations and to brackets () as a way of grouping symbols in equations to show that the calculations within the brackets should be carried out first.

In years 5 and 6, your child will learn about square numbers (when a number is multiplied by itself, for example $4 = 2 \times 2$) and cube numbers (where a number is multiplied by itself 3 times, for example $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$) and the notation for squared (2) and cubed (3). They may also be introduced to the sign for square root ($\sqrt{\quad}$). The square root of a number is the number you multiply by itself to equal the target number, for example $\sqrt{16} = 4$ ($4 \times 4 = 16$).

The resources in this category and the keyword searches can be used to help your child learn about mathematical symbols. A few ideas for games and activities to help your child practise and become more familiar with each sign at home are also outlined below.

Get Physical

Encourage your child to carry out actions to represent different mathematical symbols when saying number statements out loud. For example, make a cross out of their forearms to show a plus sign, make their forearms parallel to each other to show an equals sign or form them into an 'x' shape to show multiply.

Draw It

Ask your child to design a poster showing the different mathematical symbols they know. Can they think of other words that mean the same thing as each symbol, for example add, plus, total? Can they design their poster so that a younger child could understand?

Take It Outside

Practise using mathematical symbols when out in the garden or park. Gather together twigs to show plus, subtract, equals, greater than and less than signs. Your child could use pebbles or pine cones to show different numbers or amounts.

Greater Than and Less Than Game

Download these [0-30 number cards](#). Shuffle them and place them face down on the table. Turn over two of the number cards and make a true statement by making greater than and less than symbols with two pencils.

Step 1

Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, Division and Equals Signs

Addition, subtraction, multiplication and division are collectively known as the 'four operations'. During maths lessons at school, your child will be introduced to the addition, subtraction and equals signs first before moving on to the use of multiplication and division symbols. These posters clearly show the mathematical signs and associated vocabulary to help your child practise and consolidate their learning.



Greater Than and Less Than Signs

In year 2, your child will be introduced to the greater than and less than signs as a way of comparing and ordering numbers. Teachers often compare the symbols to a crocodile or a shark's mouth with the open part always pointing towards the larger number.

Step 2

Step 3

Solving Equations with Brackets

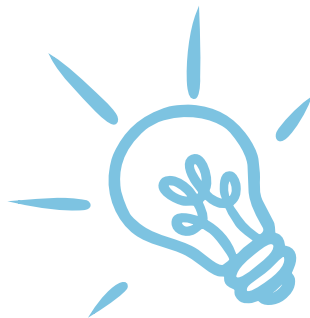
At this stage, your child may be introduced to brackets in maths. Round brackets () group digits and symbols together. When you see things inside brackets, you know you need to do them first. For example, $(4 + 3) \times (7 - 5) = 7 \times 2 = 14$. Without the brackets, the multiplication would be calculated first giving you a different answer: $4 + 21 - 5 = 20$.



Squares, Cubes and Squared Roots

From year 5, your child will be introduced to the symbols for squared (2) and cubed numbers (3) and may also be introduced to square roots ($\sqrt{\quad}$). These activity sheets can be a great way to provide extra challenge for your child in this area.

Step 4



Explore and Discover More

Twinkl Go! is a digital platform, hosting interactive content such as videos, games, audiobooks and more. Twinkl Go! enables digital content to be streamed to your computer or mobile device.



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Go!



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Book Club

Twinkl Book Club is our book subscription service. Enjoy our original works of fiction in beautiful printed form, delivered to you each half-term and yours to keep!



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Boost

Twinkl Boost is a range of intervention resources, created to support and lift learning with children at every level. These include our easy-to-use SATs and Phonics Screening resources.



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imagine

Imagine resources are designed to help your children to think creatively, question and imagine. Every week, a new topic consisting of five photos, each with related activities, is created.



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ORIGINALS

Twinkl Originals are engaging stories written to inspire pupils from EYFS to KS2. Designed to encourage a love of reading and help curriculum-wide learning through accompanying resources.



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KIDS' TV

Twinkl Kids' TV is our wonderful YouTube channel dedicated to fun and informative video-style resources full of new and creative activities you can try at home!